**11/26/23**

**Sheep & Goats**

**Matthew 25:31-46**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) Amen.

Woo-hoo! Give yourselves a big round of applause. No, we are not cheering since we have simply made it here to worship today following our Thanksgiving gatherings and meals, or our hours of watching football. We are not cheering following our time cleaning up all the dishes, or perhaps even our common practice of avoiding all the clean-up duties. We are also not cheering ourselves on following our nodding off in our turkey and tryptophan induced naps, or following the chatter and possibly even the gossip we shared while spending time with others we only happen to see a few times a year. We are also not cheering our ourselves on following any minutes or hours of traveling and navigating the roads safely and tucking down any road rage we might have.

Today we are here to cheer and give thanks for several other reasons. Now, whether you have realized it or not, you have indeed made it through another church year. You have climbed to that proverbial mountaintop by trekking through the numerous prayers, readings, hymns, and sermons together with one another that were presented by various members of our Worship Ministry Team. Our bulletin and various things we have read together this morning have reminded us that “Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the church year. It is the Sunday we honor Jesus as the king of our lives and the king of the world.” (3) We are reminded that “We gather this day to celebrate the reign of Christ and his victory over death, yet we await the consummation of all things yet to come. Acknowledging Christ as our merciful ruler, we go forth that his reign may be known in our loving words and deeds.” (1) We learn that, “The final judgment concludes both the year and this section of Gospel readings from Matthew. We stand continually within that final judgment — in the Gospel, the passion story of Jesus Christ; in our liturgical year, the advent of this passion in the incarnation.” (5)

Today we get a rather clear dose of law and gospel. Sometimes it can be rather hard to define one or the other in our readings, but they are for sure always there. It is a manner of teaching that was constructed whether we realize it or not, and I have been reminded of it often in my seminary class this semester. My professor drives the point home several times during each three-hour class session. Sometimes I kind of shake my head at it, and other times I really do get it. We need a certain construct when we are learning together to make sure we stay on track, and to make sure we are indeed fed and can consume what has been presented to us just like our Thanksgiving meals. The law that we are fed and have read here today is the “command to care for the neighbor that is bolstered with the threat of hell.” (1) The gospel that we are fed and have read here today is the affirmation of “the continuing presence of Christ in our midst. The risen Lord is not far away in some heaven, but is present among us every day.” (1) So, as we explore and consume things here today let us make sure we keep these two things in context.

As we move along with one another here let me share a story that I read in my research for this morning’s sermon preparation. I thought it was pretty cool for various reasons, and I felt it fit best into the very context of the dose of law and gospel we are indeed fed and have the opportunity to consume here this morning. Alright, here we go. So, “An army chaplain was visiting wounded soldiers in the hospital. The chaplain offered to read some Bible passages to one young soldier. But the soldier said, “I’m cold,” so the chaplain wrapped his own coat around the young man. Next, the soldier asked for something to drink. The chaplain propped up the soldier’s head and held his own water canteen to the young man’s lips. Then the chaplain asked again if he could read some passages to the young man. This time, the soldier replied, “If there is anything in that Bible that caused you to do what you’ve done for me, yes. Please read to me that part of the Bible”. (Jerry Fuller)” (4)

What a great and fabulous example we are given here in this story! Our wonderful creator has indeed shaped our minds and our hearts. You can tell when someone is doing something out of clear love and compassion in a Christlike manner, just as our Chaplain has in our story here today. On the contrary, you can also tell when someone is just doing something because it is their job and they are trying to complete their shift and earn their paycheck, or even because they are trying to earn some form or proverbial brownie points with the boss. However, God sees right through that, and I am also here to tell you that so does the individual or group of individuals that are receiving that service. Heather and I know this first hand from the jobs we work each and every day. We serve various individuals with mental and physical health diagnoses that come to our programs for services. We ensure that they receive those very services, and we try and do our very best to put our mind and our heart into each and every action and show them just a little bit of Jesus along the way. Although, to be honest, sometimes that is easier said than done. Even Heather and I have probably got caught up in the motions of work at times. That is where we draw back and realize that we are not doing this on our own. That is where we are continually reminded that we as human beings indeed have been conditioned to love one another. However, we must also remind ourselves of one of my favorite bible verses from Philippians 4:13, NRSV, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (2) It does not say I can do all things through my own actions and efforts by myself. It says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (2) We need to ask for that strength as we go out and serve, and we also need to continually come to the realization that he indeed is always with us along the journey.

Nevertheless, there is also a flip side of the coin. We learn that something has unfortunately gone gravely wrong in the world, or we get to see the goats in action a little more than we would like to. We look at things through this various lens, and look at that person working to earn their paycheck and get those brownie points with the boss that I talked about before. We find that all too often that we are expecting Christian actions of love and compassion to come out of an individual that has not actually come to know Christ. This is where we can shake our heads and do nothing about it, or this is where we can realize that we have been called into action and can choose to share the message with that person so that they can get the chance to join us in the very pasture with sheep. A goat may be a goat in our eyes, but it can be transformed into a sheep in God’s eyes. We are forever reminded that God has indeed chosen each and every one of us, or we would not be here. Just as he is present in each and every one of us daily, we come to realize that it is our biblical call to go out and serve others. You do not want to miss out on the eternal victory, and I venture you would not like others to miss out on it either. So, with God’s help let’s go out and turn more goats into sheep!

As we close things off here today I want us to keep in mind that this indeed is also a story of judgment. He will come again indeed to judge. He will come to separate the goats and the sheep on his right- and left-hand side. Thankfully, “It is by grace through faith that we know what is right and wrong. It is by grace through faith that we walk in the footsteps of Jesus rather than the world.” (6) Now, it is very easy to get things confused today. “One might look at these words of Jesus and be tempted to say that the path to heaven is paved with good works. It is just the opposite. Good works are fruits of faith and not the other way around. The sheep did not even know when they had done all of these good things. It is the same with every believer and us.” (6) Let Jesus continue to work in and through you. As long as your heart is in the right place, and he knows that then you should indeed end up on his right hand side. Keep on sheeping on!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year A 2023

 November 26th, 2023

 Christ The King

 26th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

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 Contributed by Tim Zingale on Nov 18, 2002

 Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew 25:31, Matthew 25:31-46:31

 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

 Christ The King

 Contributed by Roger Haugen on Nov 21, 2002

 Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

 Denomination: Lutheran

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 Commentary on Matthew 25:31-46

 Dirk G. Lange

 November 23, 2008

(6) SermonCentral.com

 Christ The King Will Return To Judge

 Contributed by Timm Meyer on Nov 27, 2007

 Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

 Denomination: Lutheran

 On this final Sunday of the church year our gospel is Jesus’ great story of

 judgment. In the end, the faithful are those who served Christ by ministering to

 those who are poor, hungry, naked, sick, or estranged. In the first reading God is

 the shepherd who seeks the lost, weak, and injured and feeds them with justice.

 We gather this day to celebrate the reign of Christ and his victory over death, yet

 we await the consummation of all things yet to come. Acknowledging Christ as

 our merciful ruler, we go forth that his reign may be known in our loving words

 and deeds.

 **Matthew 25:31-46**

 Jesus compares himself to a king who moves among his subjects to see how he

 is treated: what is done for the least of those who belong to his family is truly

 done for him.

 [Jesus said to the disciples:] 31“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all

 the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations

 will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a

 shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his

 right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right

 hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for

 you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I

 was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you

 welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took

 care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer

 him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and

 gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and

 welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw

 you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I

 tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my

 family you did it to me.’ 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are

 accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his

 angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave

 me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and

 you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44Then

 they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a

 stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45Then he

 will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of

 these, you did not do it to me.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment,

 but the righteous into eternal life.”